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Topsy-turvy 'Alice' a delight

By Michael Grossberg

Dispatch Theater Critic

"Nonsense" may be Anne Bogart's most rewarding and revealing subject. In *Alice's Adventures*, which had its delightful world premiere last night at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Bogart and her movement-theater troupe, SITI, don't really try to make sense of Lewis Carroll's classic fantasy.

Instead, they revel in the nonsense of it by flirting with its characters and themes — and thereby illuminate its underlying wistfulness.

The 75-minute one-act performance, adapted by Jocelyn Clarke and the company from Carroll's original text, is staged with the vivid minimalism and stylish precision that established Bogart's world reputation.

Far more accessible to the uninitiated than SITI's last Wexner world premiere in February and open to many interpretations than such a concise performance piece can only hint at, *Alice's Adventures* develops knowing flirtations between its creators and the original text, between the performers and audience and, most poignantly, between Carroll and the young girl who inspired his imagination.

Two actors conjure an entire world of topsy-turvy adventure with kaleidoscopic gestures and postures. Yet, the overall dramatic arc may be condensed too much to explore such a rich, paradoxical text. Relying largely on the audience's familiarity with the fable, *Alice's Adventures* works better as elegant commentary than as a fully satisfying re-enactment.

Jefferson Mays plays about a

THEATER REVIEW

■ The Wexner Center for the Arts will present Anne Bogart's *Alice's Adventures* at 8 tonight and Saturday and 2 and 7 p.m. Sunday in the Wexner Performance Space, 1871-N. High St. Tickets cost \$16, or \$14 for center members. Call 614-292-3533.

dozen roles with chameleonic whimsy, including the condescending caterpillar, the March hare, the Mad Hatter and a king who's a real card.

Susan Hightower plays Alice with impudence, petulance and a surprisingly angry willfulness that quickly explodes any expectations that this version will remotely remind anyone of the Disney animated film. With its libidinal edge and bittersweet ending, Bogart's *Alice* is aimed more at adults than children.

Blazingly theatrical and sculptural in its rondelet of mutating identities, *Alice's Adventures* grounds its flights of fancy with a three-dimensional box (as big as an elevator) that rotates over a larger two-dimensional white circle.

Among the most evocative *coups de theatre*: the Mad Tea Party, truly mad at a 90-degree angle to everything else; and the disappearance of May's feral Cheshire Cat.

Alice's Adventures, New York-bound and likely to become an unusually popular part of SITI's repertory, is Bogart's most beguiling Columbus effort yet — and an exciting way for the Wexner Center to launch a new season of its increasingly important Theatrical Impulse series.